

PRESS RELEASE



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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CONSUMING PASSIONS: THE ART OF FOOD AND DRINK
July 26 - October 9, 1983

Far more than a simple necessity, food pervades life: controlling it creates power, sharing it cements friendships and marks milestones, offering or abstaining from it honors or appeases gods, eating it is a sensual pleasure. Consuming Passions: The Art of Food and Drink considers food in all of its delicious, and sometimes appalling, aspects. On view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from July 26 through October 9, the exhibition comprises eighty-eight works, including paintings, prints, and objects in gold, silver, porcelain, wood, rock crystal, glass, and bronze. All were chosen by Ann Boger of the Extensions Division of the Department of Art History and Education from the Museum collections and those of several private lenders.

Arranged into three broad categories--"The Food and the Feast," "The Tableware," and "Ritual and Metaphor"--the exhibition first examines images of food in art, particularly still lifes and decorative objects. The still life emerged as a European genre in the sixteenth century, and over the next two centuries gained popularity with an increasingly prosperous middle class. Still lifes by seventeenth-century Dutch painter Abraham van Beyeren; by Phillippe Rousseau, a nineteenth-century French artist; and by Cleveland artist William Sommer suggest the genre's range--from tempting illusionistic feasts with ironic warnings about the vanity of all worldly appetites, to simple, uncontrived compositions, to abstracted explorations of form. Contemporary American sculptor Jud Nelson comments humorously on the long tradition of making objects to resemble food in Holos Series 7, No. 1 (Wonderbread), a slice of folded bread carved from white Carrara marble.

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"The Tableware" gathers a rich variety of eating utensils, bowls, drinking vessels, serving containers, and food molds from many times and places. An Italian fork and knife, whose handles are made of rock crystal mounted in enamelled gold, are luxury items from the sixteenth century, when the fork was a new utensil in Europe and dinner guests had to provide their own. Vessels come in many shapes and materials: a wooden food bowl carved in the form of a beaver from the northwest coast Indians, a ceramic shrew-shaped feeding vessel for a child of the Greek provinces in the fifth century B.C., or an eighteenth-century French tureen disguised as a basket lined with a flowered cloth and filled with game--all confected of faience, a tin-glazed earthenware.

The exhibition concludes with "Ritual and Metaphor," an examination of food as symbol or ritual offering. Vessels used in sacred rites include a bronze Chinese chüeh, or libation vessel of the twelfth to eleventh century B.C. (Shang Dynasty) and a silver-gilt English communion cup made in 1671 A.D. The many utensils used in the Japanese tea ceremony, or chanoyu, represent the ritual associated with Zen Buddhism. Most religious traditions have been concerned with food and ways to treat it; overindulgence has also been a topic, as works such as James Ensor's 1904 etching of Gluttony witness.

Accompanying the exhibition is a catalogue written by Ann Boger, who will lecture about the exhibition on Wednesday, July 27, at 8:00 pm as part of the Museum's Wednesday Evening Festival program. She will also offer gallery talks at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, August 10, and Sunday, August 14.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.